United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General recommends that Security Council extend UNPROFOR mandate for 1 year, citing recent developments in Sarajevo and possibility of overall political settlement in former Yugoslavia; appeals to Member States to provide Force with adequate resources.

+ Co-Chairmen of International Conference on Former Yugoslavia to convene meeting of Steering Committee to discuss international efforts to promote peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

+ Secretary-General says situation in Haiti does not allow for reactivation of UNMIH, but proposes that Security Council extend mandate by three months in case political impasse is breached.

+ UNHCR launches "Operation reUNite" to collect and distribute information about children separated from their parents by conflict in former Yugoslavia.

+ Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommends creation of international tribunal to prosecute genocide and crimes against humanity.

+ Secretary-General tells Conference on Decade of International Law that international legal norms and principles are dynamic resource for promoting human rights, security and development.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) be renewed for another 12 months beyond 31 March. In a report to the Security Council dated 16 March, he said that recent developments around Sarajevo indicated that an overall political settlement could be within reach in the former Yugoslavia, and that UNPROFOR reflected the will of the international community to help the parties reach such a settlement. He added that he had recommended a 12-month mandate in the interests of efficiency, although the duration might be reduced if the situation on the ground improved.

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The Secretary-General stressed that the parties in the former Yugoslavia must demonstrate -- on the ground and at the negotiating table -- their commitment to achieving peace. For its part, UNPROFOR would continue to make every effort to prevent conflict from resuming or escalating, provide a breathing space for diplomatic efforts, and support the provision of essential humanitarian aid. In the long term, the international community would help bring peace to the former Yugoslavia and stability and normal economic relations to the wider region.

The Secretary-General noted that he had had doubts as to whether UNPROFOR was a worthwhile use of the Organization's limited peace-keeping resources. In that regard, he also cited the considerable -- but unjustified -- criticism of UNPROFOR's effectiveness, mounting threats to the safety of United Nations personnel, and the continuing failure of Member States to honour their commitments to the Force in full and on time. He appealed to all States to provide the material and personnel resources necessary for UNPROFOR to fulfil its responsibilities.

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The Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, Thorvald Stoltenberg and Lord Owen, will soon convene a meeting of the Conference's Steering Committee to discuss recent developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, a United Nations spokesman announced today. That decision was taken yesterday, when the Co-Chairmen met with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to discuss international efforts to promote peace settlements in the former Yugoslavia and to plan for reconstruction and rehabilitation there.

The spokesman noted that Mr. Stoltenberg had this afternoon briefed the Security Council on the latest developments.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said that there has been no change in the Haitian situation that would allow the reactivation of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH). However, in a report dated 18 March, he suggested that the Security Council extend UNMIH's mandate in its present form for three months so that the Mission could be reactivated in the event of a breach in the political impasse. The existing mandate expires tomorrow.

The Secretary-General noted that Haitian Parliamentarians had recently agreed on a plan to resume implementation of the Governors Island Agreement, which he viewed as a "significant development." The plan had been endorsed by the Chamber of Deputies and efforts were underway to gain a similar endorsement from the Senate. However, Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide had rejected the plan, saying that it might contradict the Governors Island Agreement.

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The Secretary-General went on to say that efforts to resolve the situation continued unabated, and that his Special Representative and staff were working tirelessly to identify common ground between the parties.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today launched "Operation reUNite", a programme aimed at collecting and distributing information about children separated from their parents by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The UNHCR estimates the number of those children at 40,000 to 60,000.

The UNHCR will work with Uncompanied Children in Exile (UCE) and other voluntary agencies to collect registration forms and children's photographs. That information will be distributed to ten computer centres in the former Yugoslavia and Western Europe. According to the UNHCR, many children know where their parents live, but other details are sketchy. The programme will allow parents to cross-reference computer files using such information as nicknames, age, sex, and hair colour to locate their children.

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The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has recommended the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute genocide and crimes against humanity. Such crimes would include murder, extermination, enslavement, torture, rape and persecution on political, racial and religious grounds, and other inhumane acts against civilians. The Tribunal would also have juristiction over grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols.

The Committee, which met in Geneva last week, made its recommendation because of the growing number of racially and ethnically motivated massacres and atrocities in different parts of the world. The Committee also asked that that the Centres for Human Rights collect all relevant information on such crimes so that it could be made immediately available to an international tribunal.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said that the Decade of International Law provided an unparalleled opportunity for the United Nations, Member States and specialized agencies to promote peace and security through the application of international legal norms and principles. Protecting human rights, creating a new framework of international security, and achieving progress towards development were the real challenges of the post-cold-war era, he said in a message to the Conference on International Legal Issues Arising under the Decade. The Conference has been organized by host-State Qatar and the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee.

The Secretary-General said international law was a dynamic resource of enormous potential, but its ultimate effectiveness depended on the political

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will of States. With a firm commitment to the spirit of international law, a system of international relations could be built that would protect the rights and dignity of the individual, promote mutual respect among nations, and improve the prospects for global development.

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